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# Your Child Care Environment!

**O F C**

*An early childhood education agency*

# Update

## Inside:

- Comfortable child care spaces
- Giving children choices
- Child care environments that help children learn
- Making room for active children

## Space for Children to Learn and Grow!



The New Year is a perfect time for a fresh look at your child care environment.

Is it functional, easy-to-use, and attractive? Does it invite children to learn new skills, explore new ideas, exercise their growing bodies, and interact with other children and adults?

Your child care environment reflects your child care priorities and what you think is important in children's lives. It's one of the first things parents notice when they decide who will care for their children. And it's a place where you spend a lot of time.

With a little imagination and planning, you can make your child care environment a place that you and the children in your care look forward to everyday. Turn the page and discover how simple changes in your child care environment can make children feel **safe, powerful, smart, and energized!**

### Getting Started

- Look at the needs of the children and parents you serve. What are the ages of the children in your care? What are the interests and traditions of individual children and their families?
- Look at your child care environment from a child's point of view. Are you making changes as children grow and interests change?
- Take an inventory of your equipment and materials – keep the things children play with again and again. Put away the things they don't use. You can bring these things out later and children may use them with new excitement.
- Eliminate clutter by creating spaces to organize, display and store your play materials.

## “My environment says I belong here!”



Falls Church provider Emma Arteaga displays art work by children in her care and uses bilingual labels for child care areas in her home.

Does your child care environment make the children in your care and their families feel at home and give them a sense of belonging?

A quality child care

environment is a relaxed, and comfortable place. It makes children feel safe and encourages children and families to connect with one another. Follow these simple techniques and your child care families will say “I belong here.”

- Display photos of children and their family members, especially in entry spaces. Throughout your space include visual displays that have meaning – children’s own art work, magazine pictures that reflect children’s interests and families’ cultures.
- Display printed words in the languages spoken by the children in care.
- Give children their own spaces to hang clothing and store belongings such as favorite toys from home or artwork to be taken home.
- Offer toys, books, pictures, and materials that reflect a diverse world where people have different cultures and skin colors; where there are people of all ages and people with special needs; and where men and women can can do the same work.
- Hang child sized mirrors so that children can see themselves.

## “My environment gives me the power to make choices!”

Choices matter – especially to children. They help children develop a sense of importance and practice decision making skills.

You can promote choice by setting up an environment that encourages children to select materials and have input on how their space is arranged. Try these ideas for giving children choices:

- Arrange materials on low, open shelves which are accessible to children so they can make their own selections.
- Create a well organized environment with labeled containers to help children find, play with, and put away materials.
- Provide sufficient amounts of supplies so there are always enough options available.
- Make available a variety of materials so choices can be creative.

- Involve children in arranging and making changes in the environment to fit their play.
- Rotate materials so that children will experience changes in their choices.



A child in Emma Arteaga’s home found just the toy he wanted in a storage area at his eye level with labels to help him remember where items belong.

- If you care for children of different ages, store materials in clear containers at the eye level of the children who will use them. For example, large soft foam blocks might be on a shelf next to the floor for infants. Tiny snap blocks might be on a higher shelf, accessible only to school-agers.

## “My environment helps me learn!”



Children in Fairfax provider Be Nguyen's home enjoy a quiet area where they can read books and use the computer in a comfortable setting.

Successful child care environments encourage lots of learning. Here are some simple ways to design a “smart “ child care environment

-- one that promotes mental, physical, social, and emotional development in young children:

- Have a variety of materials available, especially those that are “open-ended” and

can be used in many ways. Water color paints, lego building toys, scarves, and play dough are all examples of materials that encourage children to use their imagination because they can be used in different ways.

- Put like toys together. For example, group items in “centers” based on the types of activity. Put books, puzzles and matching games in a quiet activities center. Create another center for more active play like blocks or (make-believe) dramatic play.
- Define activity areas. Use shelves, sheer curtains, tables, or other objects to separate activity areas. Make a sign to give the area a name. Label spaces with pictures or printed words to help children know where things belong. Children are using their minds as they sort and organize materials.

## “My environment gives me space to play!”

Children need opportunities to stretch, wiggle, and move throughout the day. Your child care environment should encourage vigorous indoor and outdoor activities that help children build strong muscles, develop coordination, and relieve stress.

Follow these suggestions to keep the children in your care active:

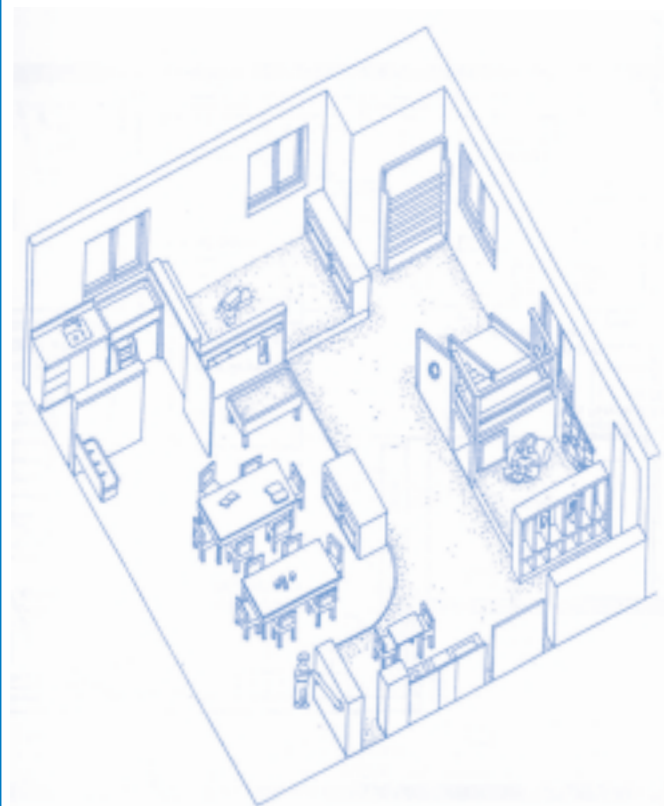
- Except in extreme cases of weather, plan for at least one outdoor playtime, preferably two, even if for only a few minutes. Ask parents to bring an extra set of clothing, warm mittens and hats. Keep an outdoor bag ready by the door with balls, jump ropes, and other active play toys.
- Organize materials in portable containers and baskets or place them in shelves with wheels. This will make it easy to create open space for an infant to crawl or preschoolers to dance.

- Use pieces of furniture for more than one use. A low, child-size coffee table can be covered with a plastic, flannel-backed tablecloth for play with play dough or for eating meals.



A large portable blackboard in Reston provider Abidi Mufti's child care area gives children plenty of space for art work and active play.

- Involve children in everyday activities that keep them moving such as easel painting, clean-up, setting the table, pouring juice, and watering plants.



## Does your child care space send these messages to the children in your care?

- This is my space—I belong here!
- I have the power to make choices about what I want to do!
- I am smart and can learn many interesting and exciting things!
- I can feel powerful and physically active here—I can have fun!

Look inside to learn new ways to be sure your environment is working for you, the children in your care, and the families you serve.